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Summary record of the 1543rd meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 31 October 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Sixth periodic report of Israel (*continued*) (CEDAW/C/ISR/6; CEDAW/C/ISR/QPR/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Israel took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 1 to 6 (continued)

2. **Ms. Kabaha** (Israel) said that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs had recently significantly increased the monthly rate allocated for the care of women and children at shelters for battered women, raising it from about $4,000 to over $5,100 per month.

3. **Ms. Arbel-Alon** (Israel) said that the Ministry of Health provided multiple services for persons who entered the country illegally over the border from Egypt. The paediatric services thus provided for free by the Ministry were comparable to those made available to Israelis, including prenatal and postnatal care and routine inoculations. As at January 2017, over 3,200 families who had entered the country illegally across the border with Egypt, including over 4,000 children, were receiving free care at the mother and child health-care station in Tel Aviv-Yafo. A specific clinic was available for undocumented migrants, which, in 2016 alone, had provided treatment to over 36,000 persons. A range of medical services and tests were provided at the facility, which were no longer limited to emergency care but extended to treatment for chronic illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes. A call for bids would soon be issued to expand the services to other cities. In 2016, 791 infants had been born to foreigners in Israeli hospitals. The cost of the hospital stay for delivery was fully covered by the Ministry of Health. Secondary medical care for prisoners was provided by health-care centres throughout the country, mainly through hospital outpatient clinics.

Articles 7 to 9

4. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to commend the State party on the progress made in increasing the number of women, including Arab women, in the Knesset. However, according to many observers, the placement of women candidates in low positions on party lists for local elections practically ensured that they would never be elected. She wondered whether the State party had any programmes in place to encourage women's participation in the political process or to increase the number of Arab women members of the Knesset and whether non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were involved in such initiatives. Were any steps taken to advocate for gender parity in political parties, including ultra-Orthodox parties whose by-laws currently prohibited women from running for office, or to establish quotas for gender parity and minority representation in the Knesset?

5. She asked whether such by-laws were legal, on what legal basis such parties could exclude women from political participation and whether the Government was considering the adoption of measures against the parties that thus excluded women's participation, for instance by means of a reduction of public financial support. The Committee would welcome information on the Government's plans to adopt quantitative targets, with timelines, for increased political participation by women in all political parties and local administrations. While welcoming the appointment of a woman as President of the Supreme Court, she noted that just four of the Court's judges were women, that women were not allowed to appear or serve as judges in rabbinical courts and that only a small percentage of diplomatic posts were filled by Arab women, who were generally assigned to secondary diplomatic missions. Notwithstanding the fact that there was gender parity in diplomatic training courses, parity was not ensured in the ranks of the foreign service. The Committee would also like to know how many ultra-Orthodox women were employed in the diplomatic corps. The State party might inform the Committee of the measures it

planned to implement to ensure that all political parties in Israel respected the principles outlined in articles 7 and 8 of the Convention.

6. **Ms. Schulz** said that the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law had limitations and completely prevented family reunification, affecting the lives of over 20,000 persons since its adoption in 2003. Under the Law, the granting and withdrawal of permits for entry into Israel were entirely within the power of the State, apparently with no application of transparent criteria, which created great uncertainty among the persons concerned. Although the Law had been amended over the years, it still prohibited Palestinians from the occupied territories from obtaining citizenship or permanent resident status in Israel through marriage with Israeli citizens or residents of East Jerusalem, although such opportunities existed for other non-Jewish spouses of Israelis. If a foreign spouse was Jewish, Israeli citizenship was acquired automatically. The law thus created unequal treatment and discriminated between people based on their citizenship or ethnic origin or that of their spouses. It also created differences in legal status within couples and families, resulting in unequal status among the members of families, whereby some were left with no legal status while other family members had full rights.

7. Women were particularly exposed to the risks arising from the Law. Couples affected by its provisions had particularly high rates of poverty owing to restrictions on persons lacking official status in respect of education and employment, for instance. Couples affected by the law faced the difficult choice of living in Israel, thus leaving one spouse undocumented, or living in the West Bank, in which case spouses with citizenship or residence rights in Israel could lose those rights.

8. Did the State party plan to relax the total ban on the entry of persons from Gaza and, if so, when? As the law seriously affected the rights of the persons involved, were there any initiatives to replace the current system with one that respected the principles of equality and proportionality? Had the State party considered adopting targeted security measures applied on a case-by-case basis so as to examine all requests for residency permits, and had it considered removing the time constraints of the present system?

9. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that women had been able to present cases at the rabbinical courts for many years. The courts were in the process of recruiting legal assistants, and such recruitment had recently been opened to women applicants. The motivation for Arab women to be represented in the judiciary, the Knesset and political parties varied. The underrepresentation of Arabs in the Ministry of Justice, for instance, probably resulted at least in part from the fact that not everyone wanted to work for the State. Many Arab women felt that it was preferable to work as public defenders instead.

10. The Government would like to see more political participation by Arab women. How to encourage Arab women to take part in political life in municipalities that were 100 per cent Arab was an open question. As for participation by Arab women in political parties, there was a lack of interest on their part in most political parties, and the coalition of Arab parties, for its part, had 13 members of the Knesset, of whom 2 were women. The State did not intervene in party politics. In some parties, the party leader personally named members to electoral lists, with no democratic process. Such parties actually tended to have more representation of women, as they were particularly aware of the need to appeal to women voters. As for the ultra-Orthodox parties, the Attorney General did not approve of their exclusion of women from electoral lists and had shared his concern with the Central Elections Committee, but no sanctions were under consideration.

11. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law had been adopted following a string of horrendous terrorist attacks, some of which had been perpetrated by persons who had obtained citizenship through family reunification. The Law had been passed as a temporary measure and had been amended and extended several times. It was currently valid until the end of June 2018. The Government was fully aware of its effect on the lives of Palestinian men and women, but it considered that the Law was necessary in the light of the security situation in the country. It had been adjusted over the years, for example by extending the validity of permits from one year to two and by easing certain restrictions, for humanitarian purposes. In 2016 and 2017, hundreds of people with

temporary permits for stays in Israel had thus been granted national health insurance under the law.

12. **Ms. Raz Shechter** (Israel) said that the ultra-Orthodox community was particularly large in Jerusalem and that women from the community were integrated into the workforce of government offices, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Arab women were included in the Ministry's cadet courses for recruitment to diplomatic posts and a number of young diplomats were already serving in various missions.

13. **Ms. Kremer** (Israel) said that training courses for careers in the foreign service were open to all women and confirmed that ultra-Orthodox women were indeed represented in diplomatic missions.

14. **Ms. Schulz** said that it was her understanding that ultra-Orthodox women were able to vote but were not allowed to run for election owing to the fact that the statutes of the ultra-Orthodox parties prevented them from doing so. How could that situation be reconciled with the country's basic laws, including the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, which clearly prohibited such discrimination? The State had failed to take all practical measures to ensure the right of all women citizens to be candidates, in accordance with article 7 of the Convention, a situation that had not been addressed in the reservation expressed by Israel in respect of the article.

15. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that there were many political parties in Israel that were not Orthodox, including some whose candidate lists were decided solely by their leaders. It would be possible and indeed practical for such parties to name women from ultra-Orthodox communities, some of whom were prominent in society, on their electoral lists, but the question would remain as to whether they would choose to join. The Government agreed with the concerns expressed by the Committee. However, it would be wrong to consider that ultra-Orthodox women had no avenues for representation.

16. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that the Attorney General had been asked to express his opinion on the matter and that he had decided not to intervene, in deference to the right of political parties to decide upon their own candidate lists.

17. **Ms. Rana** asked whether a woman could be appointed to the rabbinical courts as a judge.

18. **Ms. Schulz** asked whether the State party had considered instituting a requirement for the alternation of male and female candidates on electoral lists. If such a step was unrealistic in the current political climate, then the Government should take action to ensure that the statutes of political parties would be consistent with the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Freedom.

19. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that it was not possible for women to be appointed as judges in the rabbinical courts and that the State party had entered a reservation on that point. The issue had been regularly raised in Israel, most recently after the appointment of a woman as a qadi in the Muslim religious courts. In that case, however, there had been precedents in other countries. To the best of her knowledge, no woman had ever been appointed as a judge in a rabbinical court in any country.

Articles 10 to 14

20. **Ms. Bethel** said that she was concerned about marginalization of women and girls in the Arab, Bedouin and Christian communities in Israel and in the occupied territories and about unequal access to quality education and inequality in the budgeting and resourcing of the schools for such communities. According to some reports, ultra-Orthodox women and girls too were subjected to discrimination and segregation, for example in higher education. The State party had offered little information on access to education for women and girls from families that had come to Israel from Ethiopia.

21. Had the Government carried out any studies of the impact of efforts to improve the level of scholastic achievement in the Bedouin community? The delegation might inform the Committee what percentage of the budget was allocated to educating Bedouin children. The Committee would also like to know whether the State party ensured age-appropriate

sexual and reproductive health education for women and girls of disadvantaged groups, including those in the ultra-Orthodox community. What was the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, and how were girls reintegrated into the education system after they gave birth? The delegation should inform the Committee of the impact of specific gender programmes conducted by the Ministry of Education for the Arab, Bedouin and Druze communities and of plans for future activities along the same lines. The Committee had received reports that, in the Arab school system and textbooks, efforts had lagged in eliminating gender stereotypes. What measures were being taken to eliminate such stereotypes in the curriculum of Arab schools? Had any measures been taken to encourage Arab women and girls to choose non-traditional fields of higher education, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics or technical fields of vocational training?

22. Under the Convention, Israel had an extraterritorial obligation to respect and protect the right to education of Palestinian women and girls in the occupied territories. What measures were being taken to stop restrictions by Israeli security forces at checkpoints, which adversely affected access to education in the occupied territories? When would the ban on permitting students from Gaza to have access to educational facilities in the West Bank be lifted?

23. **Mr. Bergby** said that, notwithstanding the legal prohibition of discrimination in employment, significant wage disparities persisted in Israel and were reportedly worse in some sectors, such as information technology, than in others. The wage gap had remained at about 33 per cent over the past three decades, and efforts to reduce it through legislation and other measures had not been very effective. Did the State party envisage further incentives to encourage employers to adopt more transparent remuneration policies? He would appreciate data disaggregated by industry and by community to allow the Committee to better understand the situation of wage disparities and discrimination in Israeli society.

24. He asked whether any incentives would be introduced to encourage employers to hire women in fields that had so far been dominated by men. Certain training initiatives, for example one in Nazareth, had met with notable success in overcoming gender stereotypes and supporting women entrepreneurs. He wondered whether the Government planned to expand such programmes nationally.

25. The State party had recently passed a law establishing the obligation for employers to designate a sexual harassment officer, who should if possible be a woman. In his view, that provision might have the perverse effect of undermining the responsibility shared by men for combating sexual harassment. A law had recently been passed to mitigate the negative effects on women in the military of the integration of ultra-Orthodox men in the Israel Defence Forces. The Committee would be interested to find out how that situation and others similar to it had evolved.

26. Noting that the Government had created financial incentives specifically for the employment of ultra-Orthodox and Bedouin women, he asked whether such measures were accompanied with quotas. It had also set up eight employment centres specifically for Bedouins. The Committee would like to find out how the effectiveness of such measures was monitored and what outcomes had been achieved for women. Some 10 per cent of the Israeli population were Palestinian women, a group that had a high unemployment rate and often lived in remote villages lacking infrastructure and services, including running water, electricity, public transport and childcare, and where freedom of movement was restricted. How did the State party address their needs in terms of employment?

27. **Ms. Hofmeister** said that, although Israel enjoyed an exceptionally high standard of health care and medical resources, inequalities of access to health care continued to exist in certain places such as the occupied Palestinian territories. Infant and maternal mortality rates and life expectancies varied for Jewish women and members of other communities. Furthermore, pregnant Palestinian women were subject to particular suffering brought about by restrictions on their movement in those territories.

28. All women of childbearing age suffered from legal restrictions on the availability of abortion, the lack of information on sexual and reproductive rights, the lack of access to contraception, increasing rates of cancer and diabetes mellitus and the pressure exerted by male-dominated religious groups enforcing patriarchal traditions. She asked what steps the

State party was taking to raise awareness of sexual and reproductive rights and family planning among Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities and what additional steps would be taken to encourage religious Jewish husbands to share responsibility for childcare and household chores in order to protect their wives' health.

29. The Committee would welcome information on any measures taken to protect the human rights of Palestinian women, to establish special health-care programmes for lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons and to assess the impact of drug abuse and smoking on breast cancer and lung cancer.

30. She asked what steps were being taken to protect the mental health of female Holocaust survivors who had suffered sexual abuse in concentration camps and were now forced to confront a rise in support for right-wing parties all over Europe and new outbreaks of anti-Semitism. Lastly, she asked what programmes had been established to support women living with HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

31. **Ms. Lerer Shaib** (Israel) said that all school textbooks were examined to ensure that they incorporated a gender perspective before they were approved by the Ministry of Education. In addition, all school materials, including textbooks in Arabic, were developed in conjunction with the Department of Gender Equality.

32. Although school dropout rates for Arab girls exceeded the rates recorded for their Jewish counterparts, dropout rates for Arab girls were still relatively low and were lower than the rates for Arab boys. According to data published in 2015, 89.11 per cent of Jewish girls and 95.52 per cent of Arab girls took the final examination at the end of secondary education, known as matriculation examinations. Some 50 per cent of girls in Arab communities were eligible to enter university.

33. In line with a decision taken by the Government, the number of schools in which Jewish girls of Ethiopian descent were the majority had been reduced to 17 out of a total of 1,850. Pupils of Ethiopian descent received a voucher for extracurricular activities. The criteria applicable to programmes for gifted children had been changed to eliminate cultural bias.

34. **Ms. Arbel-Alon** (Israel) said that, since the late 1990s, cancer had been the main cause of death in Israel, accounting for 25.9 per cent of deaths among Jewish women but only 20 per cent among Arab women. Changes in demographics and economic and social indicators had a direct health impact on the health and morbidity of the populations concerned, leading, in the case of the Arab population, to an increase in longevity, a decline in infant mortality, and an increase in the presence of risk factors associated with obesity, diabetes and cancer.

35. Cases of cancer were more common among older persons. Although the Arab population was younger than the Jewish one, and had lower incidence rates for most types of cancer, the incidence of certain cancers, such as pancreatic cancer, had been rising faster among Arabs than among Jews. Disparities in the incidence of other types of cancer had been narrowing. The cancer incidence rate for both Arab and Jewish women had declined between 2006 and 2010 but had since stagnated. Morbidity rates were higher among women aged 50 and over. For almost all age groups, Arab women were less likely to contract cancer than Jewish women. Mortality rates for breast cancer had been declining in recent decades among women in both population groups. In accordance with the national breast cancer screening programme, women aged between 50 and 74 were given mammograms every two years. The mammogram take-up rate had been rising steadily for both population groups and had reached 80 per cent for both groups in 2013. Recently, a decision had been taken that made it mandatory for data on cancer treatment to be submitted to the Ministry of Health.

36. Israel was one of the few countries in the world that, in certain cases, permitted women to terminate pregnancies after the twenty-fourth week of pregnancy. Minors were also permitted to consult the board responsible for approving the performance of abortions, known as termination of pregnancy committees, without their parents' consent and knowledge. Legislation on abortion clearly set out the conditions in which pregnancies could be terminated and the procedures to be followed by the committees.

37. Health maintenance organizations had established a number of programmes to provide care to ultra-Orthodox women, including programmes that provided screening for postnatal depression, breast cancer and other preventable diseases.

38. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that Holocaust survivors were given medical and mental health care through NGOs and the National Insurance Institute.

39. **Ms. Kabaha** (Israel) said that the gender pay gap between men and women stood at around 30 per cent. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission had developed a wage gap calculator which was posted on its website that companies could use to measure wage gaps. Data gathered by the Government indicated that the gender wage gap was higher than 30 per cent in some industries and lower than 30 per cent in others. Such data enabled the Government to take steps to raise employers' awareness of the importance of narrowing the wage gap. Diversity plans established in conjunction with employers contained recommendations on recruiting more diverse staff and appointing them to positions that would cause the wage gap to be narrowed. Legal action was taken against employers who did not pay equal wages to women.

40. **Ms. Lerer Shaib** (Israel) said that girls and boys in secondary school had the option of studying gender in social science, sociology, civic studies and history. Research projects on gender could be submitted for various subjects. All counsellors in every part of the country participated in gender training courses.

41. In accordance with government resolution No. 3708, a total of 124 million new shekels (NIS) had been allocated to programmes established with the aim of improving the educational achievement of children in the Bedouin community. The Science and Technology Training Institute, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, operated a special course that included a full scholarship, a monthly income and paid transport fees for Bedouin pupils who met the relevant requirements. In 2014, 48 pupils, including 13 girls, had begun studying the course and a further 100 pupils had enrolled in it in 2015.

42. The Ministry of Education organized programmes on the prevention of early marriage that were aimed at the Arab, Bedouin and Druze communities. The purpose of the programmes was to develop participants' sense of awareness and empowerment and to inform them of the academic and professional opportunities available to them.

43. **Ms. Fefer Finarsky** (Israel) said that the General Staff had issued an order to ensure that Israel Defence Forces personnel of different genders and faiths could serve alongside each other in harmony. In accordance with that order, Orthodox Jewish men could ask to refrain from participating in activities that might contradict their beliefs, values or religious way of life. The integration of ultra-Orthodox men in the Israel Defence Forces had had no effect on the integration and advancement of women in the Force. If a female soldier considered that she had suffered discrimination on grounds of gender, she could submit a complaint to her commander, to the Soldiers' Complaints Commissioner or to the Chief of Staff's Adviser on Women's Issues, all of whom would be required to examine the complaint and deal with it appropriately.

44. **Ms. Ameline** said that she wished to know how the State party ensured that men and women, and persons of different faiths, had equal access to social welfare benefits, pensions and financing. In considering the question of access to pensions, the delegation should take account of women working in the informal sector, women who did not work and those who were forced to take early retirement. She asked what strategies had been established to tackle disparities in access to such entitlements and what the outcome of those strategies had been.

45. Noting that the State party had drawn up a climate plan, she asked how that plan addressed the concerns of women who were directly affected by climate-related issues, such as natural resource management, and whether women were considered not only as the beneficiaries of development plans but also as decision makers in relation to their implementation. Lastly, she asked what steps were being taken to ensure that women belonging to different communities had equal opportunities to enter new, innovative sectors such as the digital sector.

46. **Ms. Bethel** said that she would like to know if funds allocated to strengthen and empower Bedouin communities in the areas of education, infrastructure, employment and medical services were dependent on whether members of those communities agreed to be relocated to cities and have their homes demolished. She asked what consultation processes were carried out to ensure that members of the Bedouin community, especially women, could express their views on the forms of development that would be in the best interests of their community, why the State party did not recognize villages that were part of Bedouin ancestral lands, whether the budget that had been set aside could adequately address the many and varied problems affecting the Bedouin community, what social security programmes were in place for Bedouin women, whether women had access to credit and banking services in villages and whether support was provided to enable Bedouin women to learn about new technologies and information services that could benefit their communities.

47. Sources indicated that, in January 2017, the State party had renewed its campaign to demolish Bedouin homes in the Negev. The Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran had been demolished and replaced by a Jewish town, named Hiran, in which only Jewish Israeli citizens, or permanent residents of Israel who lived in accordance with Orthodox Jewish values, could live. In the light of the fact that the Supreme Court had sanctioned the demolition on the condition that the new town of Hiran would be ethnically mixed, she asked how home demolitions such as the ones that occurred in Umm al-Hiran could be reconciled with the State party's obligations under the Convention to protect the rights of women to housing, land and a secure family life.

48. **Ms. Kabaha** (Israel) said that age discrimination was prohibited by law. Data on a number of population groups, including persons aged 45 and over, were being collected for the Diversity Index to promote equal treatment and opportunities. An information campaign was planned for November 2017 and aimed to inform employers of the risks posed by discrimination and raise employees' awareness of their rights and the services available to them from the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission.

49. Regarding education, more than 60 per cent of the students at the country's institute of technology were Arab women. Several initiatives of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Social Services were aimed at promoting professions in the science, technology and innovation industries to Arab women. Similarly, under a 2018-2020 programme, NIS 15 million had been allocated to empower Arab women to study technical subjects in higher education.

50. **Ms. Tene-Gilad** (Israel) said that responsibility for dealing with matters related to planning in the Negev now lay with the Authority for Development and Housing of the Bedouins in the Negev, which was attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Government had recently introduced a wide-ranging five-year plan for the period 2017-2021, supported by NIS 3 billion in funding, for the purposes of empowering the Bedouin in the Negev. It focused on a number of priority areas, including education, health and infrastructure. Three-quarters of the Bedouin population were living in legally planned, urban areas. The remainder lived in hundreds of small clusters in the Negev that obstructed urban expansion and hindered the State's ability to provide basic services. Several Bedouin localities now had approved plans outlining the necessary infrastructure, services and utilities, and feasibility studies had been commissioned. However, the Government was compelled to issue demolition orders for illegal structures, since they did not adhere to planning laws. In most cases, those structures were makeshift constructions, not homes. Where possible, alternative land in planned areas was offered to the Bedouin population affected.

51. **Ms. Arbel-Alon** (Israel) said that a health-care programme for the Bedouin population had been allocated NIS 19 million, which aimed to add to the number of Bedouin women employed as health mediators, increase research on genetic conditions that were unique to the Bedouin population, provide folic-acid-enriched flour to pregnant women in villages, and establish health-care centres in areas with a large Bedouin presence. Nursing degree programmes had also begun to offer places specifically for Bedouin women and men with a view to increasing their representation in that field.

Articles 15 and 16

52. **Ms. Schulz** said that she failed to understand how the State party could be at once so modern, in areas such as science, technology and innovation, and yet unable to modernize its personal status laws. She noted that inter-faith or protestant couples, who could not be married in Israel, could get divorced but only from the rabbinical courts, which accorded men a more advantageous position. She wished to know whether the Government intended to draft legislation permitting couples who were married in civil procedures abroad to seek a divorce from a family court if they so wished and whether there were plans to allow all couples in Israel the freedom to choose between civil and religious marriage and divorce.

53. Regarding the situation of women who were unable to obtain divorces from their husbands, she wondered whether the Government envisaged calling for stricter enforcement of the law on the implementation of divorce judgments by the rabbinical courts with a view to removing the procedural burden on women seeking divorce whose husbands were recalcitrant. She would like to know what measures had been taken to ensure that the retroactive cancellation of a divorce could only take place in specific exceptional circumstances.

54. There had been an increase in cases of joint physical custody of children, even when there was great conflict between the parents. Such a development had a number of negative consequences for women and children, including an increased risk of poverty, and was contrary to the State party's established tender-years doctrine, namely that children under 6 years old should stay with their mother. She would welcome an update on the work of the Schnitt Committee, which had been tasked with examining the rules on shared parental responsibility and had recommended the removal of the provision under the guardianship law known as the "tender-years presumption".

55. She wished to know what action had been taken in respect of terminating or limiting the appointment of men in the civil service who were living in polygamous relationships. Lastly, she asked what measures were taken to prevent early marriages and whether such marriages were reported to the police, investigated and prosecuted.

56. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that a committee had been set up to tackle the issue of polygamy. The Attorney General's guidelines on polygamy and marriages involving minors were being updated. The sharia courts were obliged to report any cases of marriages of minors. Some 80 per cent of Bedouin families were polygamous. Nevertheless, her Government was seeking ways of discouraging younger men from entering into polygamous marriages.

57. **Ms. Cohen-Bakshi** (Israel) said that, since the establishment of the State of Israel, marriage and divorce had been regulated by religious law. Despite legislative proposals put forward, the Knesset had not passed any law that would allow for civil marriage and divorce. In 2010, however, it had adopted legislation on the registration of unions of persons professing religions not recognized in Israel, thus enabling them to formalize their relationship in a manner parallel to the institution of marriage. Moreover, cohabiting and same-sex couples had the same basic rights, including economic rights, as married couples, and all civil marriages performed abroad could be registered in Israel.

58. Shared custody and child support was subject to much public debate and controversy. While both parents had joint parental responsibility, the tender-youth presumption meant that, by law, the physical custody of children under 6 years of age was awarded to the mother unless there were specific reasons in the child's best interest for deciding otherwise. The Supreme Court had ruled that joint physical custody of a child could impact child-support payments, depending on the parents' income and living arrangements. The Court also ruled that the parents' ability to cooperate and afford the costs of running two separate households, as well as the sincerity of the father's application for joint custody, should be taken into account.

59. Under Jewish law, the retroactive annulment of a divorce was an extreme measure that was implemented rarely and only in exceptional cases. No such applications had been recorded in recent years. The amended Rabbinical Courts (Implementation of Divorce Judgments) Act required courts to monitor the enforcement of divorce judgments, including

by setting deadlines. Work was also under way to create an automated system for initiating proceedings within the time frame prescribed by law with a view to obviating the need for women to apply to the court.

60. **Ms. Schulz** said that she would be interested to hear an account of the situation of *mamzer* persons, who were born out of wedlock, usually as the result of a relationship between a married Jewish woman and a man who was not her husband, and were forbidden from marrying anyone except other persons with the status of *mamzer*.

61. **Ms. Ameline** said that efforts were being made around the world to reconcile women's rights and religious practices. In that spirit, she wondered whether the increased public dialogue in relation to polygamy might lead to further modernization of religious practices.

62. **Ms. Bethel** asked what specific policy the State party had in place to ensure that teenage mothers were able to return to school to complete their education.

63. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said it was important to point out that polygamy was practised by the Bedouin in the south of the country, and not among the rest of the Muslim population. It was a tribal rather than a religious practice. Israel was a society in transition and, since it was a Jewish State, discussions about the practice of polygamy among the Muslim Bedouin population were sensitive. Lastly, there was no reason why teenage mothers could not return to school to complete their education.

64. **Ms. Cohen-Bakshi** (Israel) said that there was no concept of illegitimacy in Israel. However, in both Jewish and sharia law, a child born to a married woman and a man other than her husband faced serious challenges. A change in the law was unlikely to have any effect on what was a religious and social issue. That said, there were very few persons with the status of *mamzer*, and efforts to resolve the issues surrounding divorce could eliminate the problem entirely.

65. **Ms. Palmor** (Israel) said that the dialogue had been challenging and constructive. While it had not been possible to discuss all the issues women faced in the country, it had been an opportunity to learn from the Committee and see things from a different perspective.

66. **Ms. Raz Shechter** (Israel) said that there had been a clear will to engage in a substantive and open dialogue. Israel remained committed to implementing the Convention and would examine carefully the Committee's remarks and forthcoming concluding observations.

67. **The Chair** said that she wished to thank the State party for its report, which had been submitted under the simplified reporting procedure, and invited the State party to consider approving the amendment of article 20 (1) of the Convention, on the meeting time of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.